

Mass in Motion: Statewide Policy Initiatives

Helping Residents Eat Better with Executive Order 509

Obesity rates are up, fried foods and sugary drinks are the norm, and fruits and vegetables are missing from many people's plates. Massachusetts residents are in need of a change, and the state is helping to lead the way. "Telling people to eat more fruits and vegetables is one thing, but the state is taking it one step further," says Nutrition Coordinator Cynthia Bayerl of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

Governor Patrick's Executive Order 509 (EO 509), *Establishing Nutrition Standards for Food Purchased and Served by State Agencies*, requires state agencies which provide food as part of their client and patient services to follow specific nutrition standards when purchasing and serving foods and beverages.

DPH formed an Advisory Workgroup and developed a draft of the nutrition standards based on those of New York City and the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. A baseline survey of over 60 state agencies identified nine agencies that would be impacted by the policy. The Workgroup

invited representatives from those agencies to participate and help finalize the standards.

Impacted agencies include:

- » Dept. of Children and Families
- » Dept. of Corrections
- » Dept. of Developmental Services
- » Dept. of Mental Health
- » Dept. of Youth Services
- » Dept. of Veteran Services
- » Executive Office of Elder Affairs
- » Public Health Hospitals
- » The Sheriff's Department

The collaboration between the Workgroup and the nine agencies led to a realization that several of the standards would be difficult for state agencies to meet. The Workgroup responded to these issues by developing online resources directing agencies to helpful websites and videos; creating fact sheets used to train employees on topics like serving healthy foods and drinks and reducing sodium; and developing an online course for preparing and serving healthy foods with the John Stalker Institute at Framingham State University.

Massachusetts is the first state to successfully launch a state-wide

food procurement policy. "Some clients depend on state agencies for food and drinks – they should have the option to make healthy choices for themselves," states Bayerl. Several state agencies, including the Worcester and Taunton State Hospitals and the Department of Children and Families, are already making big changes to the foods they prepare and serve clients. These changes include:

- » Eliminating saturated and trans fats from breads and desserts
- » Replacing salt shakers with Mrs. Dash on cafeteria trays
- » Replacing white rice, breads and pastas with whole grains
- » Using mostly fresh fruits and vegetables
- » Offering 1% milk with all meals
- » Offering lower-sugar cereals to kids
- » Removing soda from youth shelters

Over thirteen hundred employees have completed the training course. As professionals from other states seek guidance in developing their own food procurement policies, DPH looks forward to helping them and many more Massachusetts state agencies offer clients and patients easier access to healthy foods.

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